

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of delivering a surround-sound audio signal over the Internet to a client using conventional Internet stereo sound streaming techniques while maintaining compatibility with multiple audio signal sources, the method comprising:

5 providing a multi-channel audio signal source at a first Internet broadcast location;

encoding the multi-channel audio signal source into a two-channel format;

10 converting the encoded two-channel audio signal source to a streaming format for transmission over the Internet;

transmitting the streaming format of the encoded audio signal source to a client location;

reconverting the streaming format of the encoded audio signal into an encoded two-channel audio format;

15 decoding the two-channel format of the audio signal into a multi-channel audio output signal for playback by the client; and

20 permitting the client to access, decode, and playback a plurality of types of audio source signals from a second Internet broadcast location where the relative quality of the resulting audio output signals are dependent upon the formats of the original audio source signals.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of types of audio source signals includes conventional stereo signals.

3. The method of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of types of audio source signals includes Dolby surround encoded audio signals.

25 4. The method of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of types of audio source signals includes a monaural signal.

5. The method of Claim 1, wherein the client represents an individual personal computer user.

30 6. The method of Claim 1 wherein encoding the multi-channel audio signal source into a two-channel format is performed using the CS 5.1 encoding method.

7. A method of delivering and managing specialized software applications over the Internet where the specialized software applications are delivered from individual server partners to a corresponding group of client personal computer users, the method of delivering and managing specialized software applications comprising the following steps:

5 delivering a first specialized software application from a first server partner to a first client computer wherein the first specialized software application displays a customized message, associated with the first server partner, on a video screen of the client computer while using the first specialized software application to access the website of the first server partner, and wherein  
10 the first specialized software application displays a customized message, associated with the first server partner on said video screen of the first client computer, when the first specialized software application is used to access a locally-based file of the first client computer;

15 delivering a second specialized software application from a second server partner to a second client computer wherein the second specialized software application displays a customized message, associated with the second server partner, on a video screen of the second client computer while using the second specialized software application to access the website of the second server partner, and wherein the second specialized software application displays a  
20 customized message, associated with the second server partner, on a video screen of the second client computer while using the second specialized software application to access a locally-based file of the second client computer; and

25 displaying the customized message associated with the second server partner whenever the first client computer using the first specialized software application access the website of the second server partner.

8. The method of Claim 7 wherein the first specialized software application comprises a graphical user interface with audio enhancement characteristics for processing of audio received from the first and second server partners, respectively.

9. The method of Claim 7 further comprising the step of disabling a portion of the specialized software application when the first client computer is accessing a website other than the first server partner or the second server partner.

10. A method for managing and operating a specialized software application downloaded from the Internet and residing within a client computer system comprises the following steps:

receiving and storing a software application within a client computer from a first Internet source;

operating the software application on the client computer and displaying a message associated with the first Internet source whenever the first Internet source is accessed by the client computer and whenever the software application is used to access a file stored within the client computer;

operating the software application on the client computer and determining whether a second Internet source accessed by the client computer is a member of a qualified group;

displaying a message associated with the second Internet source if the second Internet source is a member of the qualified group; and

disabling a function of the software application within the client computer system if the second Internet source is not a member of the qualified group.

11. An audio correction system for enhancing spatial and frequency response characteristics of sound reproduced by two or more loudspeakers, said audio correction system comprising:

an image-correction module configured to correct a perceived vertical image of sound when said sound is reproduced by a plurality of loudspeakers;

a bass-enhancement module configured to enhance a perceived bass response of said sound when said sound is reproduced by a plurality of loudspeakers;

an image-enhancement module configured to enhance a horizontal image of sound when said sound is reproduced by a plurality of loudspeakers; and

a rights-management module configured to enable said audio correction system when playing streaming audio from an authorized web site.

5 12. The audio correction system of Claim 11, wherein correction provided by said image correction module precedes enhancement provided by said bass-enhancement module.

13. The audio correction system of Claim 11, wherein bass enhancement provided by said bass-enhancement module precedes image enhancement provided by said image-enhancement module.

10 14. The audio correction system of Claim 11, wherein bass enhancement provided by said bass-enhancement module precedes image enhancement provided by said image-enhancement module.

15 15. An audio enhancement and rights management system comprising:  
a customized browser interface configured to enable an image enhancement module of an audio stream when playing streaming audio from a licensed Internet site; and

a multi-channel surround sound decoder configured to receive said streaming audio information, decode said streaming audio information, and provide decoded audio information to said image enhancement module.

20 16. The audio enhancement and rights management system of Claim 15, said image enhancement module comprising:

a height-corrector for correcting a perceived height of an apparent sound stage;

a bass-enhancer for enhancing bass response of a sound signal;

25 a width-corrector for correcting a perceived width of said apparent sound stage.

17. The audio enhancement and rights management system of Claim 15, wherein said customized browser interface is configured to display a logo corresponding to said licensed Internet site.

30 18. A method of delivering a surround-sound audio signal over the Internet to a client using conventional Internet stereo sound streaming techniques while maintaining compatibility with multiple audio signal sources, the method comprising:

providing a multi-channel surround sound audio signal source at a first Internet broadcast location;

encoding the multi-channel audio signal source into a two-channel format;

5 converting the encoded two-channel audio signal source to a streaming format for transmission over the Internet;

transmitting the streaming format of the encoded audio signal source to a client location;

10 reconverting the streaming format of the encoded audio signal into an encoded two-channel audio format;

decoding the two-channel format of the audio signal into a multi-channel surround sound audio output; and

15 processing said multi-channel surround sound audio output to produce a two-channel audio output, said two-channel audio output configured to simulate said multi-channel surround sound audio output when played on a pair of loudspeakers.

19. The method of Claim 18, wherein said encoding comprises encoding using a CS 5.1 encoder.

20 20. The method of Claim 18, wherein said decoding comprises decoding using a CS 5.1 decoder.

21. An apparatus for delivering a surround-sound audio signal over the Internet to a client using conventional Internet stereo sound streaming techniques while maintaining compatibility with multiple audio signal sources, comprising:

25 means for encoding a multi-channel audio signal source into a two-channel format;

means for converting the encoded two-channel audio signal source to a streaming format for transmission over a computer network to a network client;

means for reconverting the streaming format of the encoded audio signal into an encoded two-channel audio format;

30 means for decoding the two-channel format of the audio signal into a multi-channel audio output signal for playback by the client; and

